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ABSTRACT

Central to restructuring efforts in Australia was the establishment of school decision-making groups (SDMGs), which gave school staff and community representatives more autonomy over decisions concerning educational policy and school development. This paper presents findings of a study that examined the responses of three secondary schools to the mandated establishment of school decision-making groups and school-development planning. The three secondary schools were located in Perth, Western Australia. Interviews were conducted with school district superintendents, school-development officers, principals, deputy principals, and school-based decision-making steering committees. Findings indicate that context exerts the most pronounced influence on the implementation process, and that change should be viewed as context dependent. In particular, the existence of a collaborative approach toward administrative decision making was strongly related to positive reception of the SDMG implementation. In addition, the level of the principal's commitment affected the school community's attitude toward school-based decision making. Participants in decision making considered concerns other than rational costs and benefits in evaluating the organizational fit of innovations to schools. In conclusion, the unique nature of each school's organizational characteristics appeared to influence not only receptiveness to restructuring and reform but the type of change strategies adopted, the range of information and assistance used, and most importantly, the degree to which members of the organization would persrvere with the implementation process. Contains eight references. (LMI)

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Establishing School Decision-making Groups:Problems confronted by three Secondary Schools in Australia

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Background and Rationale

Over the last decade many Central Education Authorities in Australia, New Zealand, Britain and the United States have embarked on a process to devolve decision-making and to establish school based management within their respective schooling systems. In Western Australia a far reaching restructuring program titled "Better Schools" (1987) was launched to transform a highly centralised government school system through the creation of self-determining schools. Central to the restructuring endeavours was the establishment of school decision-making groups (SDMG's). These groups were to serve as the basis of an approach to school-based management which permitted school staff and community representatives to exercise more autonomy over decisions concerning educational policy and school development.

Some five years after the initial pronouncement of "Better Schools", progress towards the establishment of self determining schools has been erratic. In June 1993 the Ministry of Education released a discussion document designed to rekindle debate on school based management. "Devolution: the Next Phase " (1993) raised a number of issues concerning the nature of site based management. Central to these issues was the enhanced role of the School Decision-making Group with respect to School Development Planning, Financial Planning and Management and, Accountability. The release of this discussion document led to renewed concern by educators and the teachers union about the implications for such changes on the nature of schooling and terms and conditions of their employment.

At a system level, many of the continuing difficulties associated with school restructuring and reform appear to stem from a lack of understanding about how school level personnel respond to and implement change. The purpose of this paper is to present a detailed account of the responses occurring at three secondary schools to the mandated establishment of school decision-making groups and school development planning. By so doing, it is hoped the cross-case analysis will illuminate the dynamics and difficulties associated with such change. Such insights into the realities of restructuring and reform might led to more sensitive and informed actions by both policy makers and school- level implementors alike.

Theoretical Perspectives

In the 1980's literature concerned with planned educational change suggested the process is more complex and dynamic than previously thought; and subject to the influence of many factors over a long period of time. This realisation led researchers to consider not only the characteristics of the innovation itself but also contextual explanations of the change process. Researchers such as Huberman (1983) and Fullan (1985), have advocated focusing on the local or "micro" implementation process. Here the change process is viewed as being influenced by the social or cultural characteristics of the setting. From this perspective, change involves alteration to the

cultural context, to the beliefs and practices of its members, and to relationships among people within the organisation targeted for change. In short, change can be seen as the creation of a new setting. Given the above foci it seemed appropriate to adopt a more holistic perspective, that is, a perspective that would give attention to what happens at the school site when participants attempt to establish school decision-making groups.

Research Approach

It was within this holistic framework, that the research study was undertaken to critically analyse the adoption and implementation process. The study assumed that the processes of school organisational change involved the interaction of an innovation with a particular school setting. Accordingly three senior secondary schools drawn from three different school discticts in Perth, Western Australia were targeted for case-study. For each school, specific attention was given to the nature of the policy innovation (school-based decision-making groups); the nature of the characteristics of the school organisation; and the interactions between the policy and the setting characteristics.

In order to gain an adequate understanding of the change process at the school level, complex data of different types needed to be collected from a number of different sources, hence a multi-instrument approach formed the basis of data collection. While the primary data source was derived from interviews of participants involved in the change process (principals, parents, and teaching staff), additional techniques including non-participant observation, content analysis of printed documents such as policy statements, and observations of planning meetings, were used. Generally, data were collected that would give insight into the planning and decision making activities at the school level. This focus was adopted in order to highlight the relationship between the innovation and change as both are influenced by the characteristics of the school setting .

In examining change from a school organization perspective this study emphasizes the quality of the implementation process. Rosenblume & Louis (1981) defined quality of implementation as the degree of difference in content behaviour or structure within the organization after the change. Consequently, the change process is seen as those events and activities occurring as the school moves from the existing state of routine behaviours to a new state of routine behaviours with respect to school-based decision-making.

Data Collection

Both formal and informal interviews were conducted with all members of the school community who held responsibility for the implementation of the policy on school-based decision-making groups. This included School District Superintendents, School Development Officers, Principals, Deputy Principals, participants of the School-Based Decision-Making Group steering committees.

The interviews were audio-taped and fully transcribed. Each transcription was coded to indicate tape number, tape side counter number and person responding. These interviews served as a valuable data source for verbatim accounts of participants' responses to semi structured yet open questions. A photocopy of each transcript was mailed to the respondents to enable them to check the accuracy of their responses and to make additional clarifying statements should they so desire. The information from interviews served as the methodological core of the research with observations and document review used to check the interview data and to assist in structuring on-going informal interviews.

Data Analysis

There is a variety of techniques available to qualitative researchers to help them discipline their inquiries while maintaining subjective understanding. While techniques for reducing, sorting and analysing data are highly individualistic in their details, they are often quite similar conceptually. Miles & Huberman (1984) asserted that data analysis consists of three concurrent flows of activity involving - data reduction, data display, conclusion-drawing / verification. Data reduction refers to the process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting, and transforming the raw data that appear in interview transcripts and field notes, thus organizing the data in such a way that final conclusions can be drawn and verified. The second activity is that of data display; this suggests an organized assembly of information that facilitates conclusions to be drawn and some action taken. Finally, Miles & Huberman (1984) recommend conclusion-drawing and verification to assist in analysis of data. This activity involves drawing meaning from displayed and reduced data by noting regularities, patterns, explanations, and propositions. Miles & Huberman (1984), suggest that although a competent researcher tends to hold such conclusions lightly, maintaining openness and skepticism, the conclusions are still there. They may be vague at first, then become increasingly explicit and grounded as the research proceeds.

While the analysis of data for this study was guided by the initial research questions, the three concurrent activities discussed above were present throughout the process. Essentially the analysis procedure consisted of the following eight steps:

i. A reading of the transcripts and field notes for a general impression, after which summaries were made of each interview and emerging patterns and themes were noted.

ii. These themes coupled with the initial research questions were used to develop headings and codes Interview transcripts and all other data were coded accordingly.

iii Data from each source was organized under the headings suggested by the codes then checked against the research questions.

iv. For each research question and theme, data from different sources were recorded under separate columns. Further searchers for contradictory or confirmatory data were undertaken before data were combined. This enabled "triangulation" to ensure the accuracy and credibility of the data.

v. This combined data was re-read and used as a framework to guide the writing of case study profiles and descriptions of the process for each school.

vi. Draft copies of the case study and process descriptions were sent to the principals and a key participant at each school to seek confirmation of accuracy and reflectiveness.

vii. The frame work was next used to develop thematic descriptions of the change process across schools.

viii. Common themes and issues emerging from the descriptions served as a basis for the generation of propositions about the change process and recommendations for action when implementing change.

While the above listing of procedure suggests a relatively straightforward set of events, nothing could be further from reality. The vast quantity of data collected and the numerous inter-related themes emerging from that data made analysis an extremely protracted and taxing process.

While documenting the advantages of the case study approach for this study, mention must be made of its limitations. One limitation of the case study method concerns the concept of generalizability. It has been argued that the results of a single case study cannot be generalized to other settings. This argument is seen by Spirer (1980), as a criticism that refers only to statistical generalizations. That is, generalizations that are made from a sample to a population, are only acceptable if strict statistical requirements are satisfied.

However, an alternative perspective of "generalization" is held by Adelman, Jenkins, & Kemmis (1976) :

> Case study data, paradoxically, is 'strong in reality', but difficult to organize. ... A reader responding to a case study report is consequentially able to employ the ordinary processes of judgement by which people tacitly understand life and social actions around them ... They are 'a step to action'.
>
> Their insights may be directly interpreted and put to use for staff or individual self-development, for institutional feedback, for formative evaluation, and in education policy making. (Adelman et al, 1976, p141)

Ultimately it is the reader who must judge as to whether the study has relevance to other cases. Despite their diversity, schools and individual students share many characteristics. The critical processes involved in implementing organizational changes are likely to be common to numerous other schools. With regard to this study it is proposed that readers will make generalizations:

i. About the nature of the change process;

ii. From the individual case to a class which it purports to portray; that is, from a particular school to others with similar profiles;

iii. About the class to different classes : that is, about Secondary Schools to District High schools undergoing the organizational change process.

iv. Across cases;

v. About current and future Ministry policies; and

vi. About current and future school organizational procedures and actions.

The analysis offered here not only examines group processes, but also the impact of information and assistance that appeared influential or decisive to the implementation process across the three school sites.

Discussion

The discussion section of this paper has been organised around phases in the implementation process. Generally, the implementation process appeared to be comprised at least two sub-processes or phases (the initiation phase and the adaptation phase) The initiation phase concerns the initial school-level response to the formation of Decision-Making Groups while the adaptation phase concerns the planning process associated with establishing a Decision-making Groups. It is these two phases that serve as an organizing framework for the analysis. Within each phase, attention is given to the issues and interactions occuring among administrators, staff and parents of each school site as the implementation process unfolds. In an attempt to preserve anonomyity the schools have been given the following pseudonyms, Langley Senior High School, Jardine Senior High School, and Maylup Senior High School.

The Initiation Phase

This phase of the implementation process was similar to the readiness stage described by Rosenblum & Louis (1981). The degree of readiness or "preparedness" of the school to undergo change varied not only among members within each school community, but also between the schools.

The variation among staff and parents preparedness for change appeared related to the differential access to information concerning the establishment of SBDMGs among participants. Variation between schools seemed related to specific setting characteristics of the school itself. Taken together, the perceptions about the innovation and the existing characteristics of the school setting, indicated a school's disposition to action rather than a cause of implementation. Generally, this phase was characterized by what Weick (1976) described as a period of uncertainty and openendedness.

Principal Advocacy and Leadership

Given that Ministry of Education information concerning School Based Decision-making Groups (SBDMG) was disseminated within the school community via the school Principal, it was understandable that Principals were best informed about the substance of proposed changes. Further, each Principal had formed ideas about the possible structure and function of the SBDMG to be established. For the Principals of Maylup and Jardine, experience with the establishment of a SBDMG at their previous schools had equipped them with clear and quite firm views about the appropriate structure and functions of SBDMGs.

Despite their agreement with the philosophy of self determining schools, all Principals indicated concern about the establishment of SBDMGs. Of particular concern was the efficiency of a participatory approach to the decision-making procedures of the school. The Principals of both Maylup and Langley perceived participatory decision-making to be potentially time consuming, complex and hence inefficient. Both Principals expressed a preference for a more authoritarian approach, yet they could see that the opportunity for input from staff and community members had value to the school. Further, all three Principals expressed some concern about the impact that a SBDMG might have on their authority. Accordingly, they expressed an intention to develop structures that preserved or enhanced their "traditional" role as Principal.

While the Principals held a sound knowledge of the nature of the change, other members including staff and parents had little understanding of the decisions they faced, nor the possible solutions they might employ to implement the innovation.

Information

Teaching staff and parents' perceptions about the policy on SBDMGs seemed to vary according to what information had been disseminated by the Principal or had been obtained through other sources. At Langley for instance, there had been open discussion among staff and parents about the Better Schools Programme and specific aspects such as the establishment of a SBDMG, while at Maylup and Jardine, very limited discussions had taken place with staff and even less with parents.

For the staff at Maylup and Jardine, the only official document disseminated was a Ministry of Education re-print of the initial Better Schools Programme in a in-house newletter called Western Australian Education News. Due to a lack of clarity in the wording of the Better Schools Programme it seemed inevitable that staff perceptions of the policy on SBDMGs would be confused. From the responses of staff interviewed at Maylup and Jardine, it was apparent that many staff members viewed the change as a purely political and economic cost-cutting exercise. Further, a deal of confusion existed about the intended structure and function of SBDMGs. For example, many staff viewed the SBDMG as an all powerful body that would exercise authority over the selection and

tenure of the Principal and the hiring and firing of staff. While an assurance was offered by the Ministry that employment and payment of staff would remain the responsibility of the Ministry, many staff interpreted the statements as vesting unacceptable authority in the SBDMG.

Staff also expressed concern about the possible intrusion that an empowered SBDMG might make into the curriculum decision-making arena (pedagogic sub-system). There was a perception among staff members that it was inappropriate for non-educationalists parents and community members to be making policy in this area as well as determining the operations of the school.

Concerns about the establishment of Decision-making Groups seemed strongly associated with the lack of sufficient guide-lines and support for implementation from the Ministry of Education. For the Principal of Jardine, this lack of specificity was viewed positively since it enabled the establishment of a SBDMG that could assume more critical and powerful functions than those implied in the policy statement. However, the Principals of Langley and Maylup Senior High Schools expressed a preference for clear guide-lines as to the structure and functions of SBDMGs. They were particularly concerned about the lack of any legislative frame-work governing the establishment of SBDMGs. Without such guide-lines and legislative frame-work in place they felt it could be possible that the SBDMG established at the school might not conform in both structure and function to eventual Ministry regulations. Their concern over the lack of specific guide-lines also reflected a history of dependence by state schools on the Ministry of Education to direct and prescribe changes for schools. Such concern also suggests that the philosophy of self-determination for schools had not been fully understood by those at the school level.

Assistance & Support

Finally, the Principals felt too little assistance had been made available to schools to prepare staff and community members for the implementation of the Better Schools Programme. They felt the Ministry had left it to the Principals to inform staff and parents about the philosophy underpinning Better Schools as well as details of the various associated initiatives. It was the Principal who had a responsibility to generate sufficient enthusiasm among members of the school community about the implementation of SBDMG's. The Principal was also charged with the responsibility to offer the type of leadership and support that would ensure successful change would occur. All Principals saw such a function as complex and extremely demanding of their energy and time.

Although the Ministry had established District support mechanisms to assist school communities, only two of the schools under study utilized such support. Langley sought and received on-going assistance from the district School Development Officer (SDO) to clarify policy statements on both SBDMGs and Development Plans. To a lesser extent, Maylup also sought some assistance from the SDO, but such assistance was confined to the initial planning stages only. At Jardine and to some

extent at Maylup, little confidence was expressed in the appropriateness and or practicality of support available from both the SDO and the superintendent.

Goodness of Fit

It was apparent that receptivity of initial responses by members of each school community appeared to be strongly influenced by the existing characteristics of the school setting. Of particular influence was the school organizational climate, the existing decision-making procedures, the schools relationship to the community and the nature of leadership within the school. All such characteristics seemed to influence school staff perceptions about the organizational fit of the innovation; that is, how well the notion of a SBDMG would mesh with the existing structures and procedures of the school.

Data indicated that a sound organizational climate, and a history of collaboration in decision-making, promote a more receptive initial stance to change. For Jardine where the climate was poor, and there was no history of collaboration in decision-making, it was anticipated that the change would not only be a poor fit with the existing organization, but that there would be problems with both staff and parental support for such change. Initial perceptions about the innovation appeared related to the type of subsequent action undertaken by the schools during the adaptation stage. Where school staff perceived the innovation to be important and have "good fit" with the characteristics of the school setting, there appeared positive commitment to implementation. Where school staff perceived the innovation to be a "poor fit" with particular local characteristics of the school, the necessity for change was often questioned. Further, as the difficulties and complexity of the change were identified, there was general reluctance to commence implementation phase.

The Adaption Phase

The initial action undertaken at all three sites involved the establishment of a small group usually termed a steering committee. These steering committees comprised representatives from the total school community. The representatives had the task of preparing guide-lines to define both the structure and functions of the SDMG. In order to develop such guide-lines, the steering committee members undertook to "translate" Central Office policy on SDMG's within the specific context of the school. Knowledge about the particular and often unique characteristics of the school setting prompted decisions to be made about what was a desirable and appropriate interpretation of the policy on SDMGs for the school. Further, the policy prompted specific changes to the existing decision-making structures and procedures of the school in order to accommodate the change.

Key Players in the Planning Process

At all three schools the steering committees comprised the Principal, staff and parent representatives. For both Langley Senior High School and Jardine Senior High School the key member of the steering committee appeared to be the Principal. At the third site, Maylup Senior High School, there were two key members. One was a classroom teacher who had been elected Chairperson of the steering committee, the other was the Principal. Across all three schools, the role of each key player was remarkably similar. They organized the agenda for each meeting, co-ordinated meeting procedures and, most importantly, distributed information regarding Ministry policy on SDMGs. However, it should not be inferred that all key players dominated the adaptation process to the extent that they determined the course of events. Indeed, the degree of domination varied across the sites.

For example, at Maylup the Chairperson of the steering committee assumed individual responsibility for drafting guide-lines (in this case a constitution). He expressed the view that once drafted, other members of the steering committee could modify it by adding or deleting aspects. However, through his initial input, a basic control over the direction of the guide lines would remain with the Chairperson. With the arrival of the new Principal, new ideas about the structure and function of the SDMG were introduced to the steering committee. These ideas were based on the model of the decision-making group operating at the Principal's previous school. The Principal urged the adoption of the model not only citing its proven success, but also the disadvantages involved of having to "re-invent the wheel". The Principal reminded the steering committee of the one year Central Office timeline for implementation. This meant that there was insufficient time remaining to develop and design a unique model for Maylup.

During subsequent meetings of the steering committee discussions revolved around the extent to which the emerging constitution could reflect the Principal's model. While the Principal appeared to allow the Chairperson to set the focus of discussions, both the minutes and field notes taken revealed that on several key issues the Principal's views prevailed. Firstly, the Principal insisted that the SDMG be the only policy decision-making body and that all other bodies including the P&C be subservient to it. Secondly, the Principal insisted that the central authority of the office of "Principal" be recognized and maintained in statements of the function of the SDMG. And finally, that a sub committee, comprised mainly of staff be established to make the critical decisions concerning school development. Plans emerging from this "sub committee" would be presented to the SDMG for ratification.

While the influence of the Principal within the steering committee was clearly evident, there were other members of the group who also influenced the decisions taken. In particular, the Chairperson, the existing president of the Parents & Citizens Association (P&C) and a parent representative, appeared to be familiar not only with formal meeting procedure but also with the formulation of a

constitution. Indeed, all three representatives contributed much with regard to the framing of the objectives of the constitution. Of particular significance was their successful re-working of the group's objectives to include participation in the formulation and ratification of educational policy, as well as the monitoring and review of the school development plan. These additional objectives represented a considerable expansion of the decision-making power of the group from the largely supportive functions initially suggested in the Principal's model. The president of the Maylup P&C in support of an empowered SDMG, expressed a willingness to push for amendments to the constitution of the P&C to ensure that it was subservient to the new SDMG. Any possible objections from the Principal appeared stymied by the Chairperson's use of the enabling legislation to press for such functions.

At Langley there were two distinct planning phases for the establishment of a SDMG. In the first phase, the Principal of Langley called for the formation of a steering committee. The resulting committee consisted of the Principal, the SDO, two members of staff and one parent. As convener, and by virtue of her positional authority, the Principal assumed an important and influential role within this committee. During the initial meetings the Principal expressed concern about two issues that appeared to influence the direction of decisions taken. The first concerned the anticipated difficulty of generating sufficient parental interest to permit adequate community representation on a SDMG. The second concerned the potential interference that an empowered SDMG might have on the operations of the school and upon the authority of the Principal. Further, given the existence of a committee dealing with school development issues, the Principal felt that any new group ought to take on a school/community support role rather than deal with educational policy issues.

Outside of the meetings, the Principal spent time sharing her concerns and discussing the issues of structure and function of the proposed SDMG with the School Development Officer and the two staff representatives. These two staff representatives were given the brief to develop guide-lines for the establishment of the decision-making group. Given the existence of shared concern, it came as no surprise that the resulting guide-lines suggested the group should function in close cooperation with the school administration in promoting and supporting the school. Included in the statement of function was the recognition that the Principal retained responsibility for the management of the school. Apart from making recommendations about school policy, the decision-making authority of the group appeared strictly limited.

Central Office Clarifying Documents.

Despite the existence of such guide-lines, the function of proposed SDMG's was not fixed. As steering committees at all three schools continued to meet Central Office documentation concerning the structure and functions of SBDM's were released. These documents, and in particular the draft enabling legislation, suggested a more critical role be assumed by a decision-making group in school development planning. Such a role was clearly not accommodated within the guide-lines being

framed at each school site. At Langley, the new functions of a SBDM contained in such Central Office documents seemed to replicate the existing functions of the Langley school development committee. This emerging emphasis of the critical role of the SDMG prompted a re-assessment of the planning direction the steering committee was taking.

Decision Dynamics

During the ensuing planning meetings the Principal of Langley sought to influence the eventual functions of the SDMG by limiting discussion about such issues. The steering committee was not informed about the possibility of their assuming responsibility for policy generation, development planning, monitoring and review. Further, through control of the agenda, the meetings served as a forum for the dissemination of information about domestic issues, rather than engaging in any specific decision-making. When asked about the extent to which parent representatives participated in the generation of policy and development planning, the Principal responded:

> No, no, not at all... they are just there. They are there so we can say that parents have been involved in the meetings.

This token participation of parents in the steering committee was evident throughout the planning meetings. As the Deputy Principal observed:

> I don't think our parents or community members influence the planning process at all.

At Jardine the new Principal entered a school with a particular vision for the school. He expressed a desire to "revitalize" the school by undertaking a radical re-organization of the existing decision-making procedures. Of fundamental importance to such a re-organization was the creation of a SDMG that had broad powers over school policy, resources and budgeting and that it would co-ordinate a number of proposed sub-committees. Much of the basis of this vision was derived from the Principal's experience with the establishment of a SDMG at his previous school. Indeed the Principal brought with him a model for a school council that represented what he believed to be a successful and therefore desirable model for Jardine. However, he did not propose to fully replicate this model; rather, he was anxious for representatives of the school community to consider his model in light of the unique requirements of Jardine.

Because the Jardine school community had given very little prior consideration to the formation of a SDMG, the Principal saw his role as the key promoter and facilitator of change. Accordingly, he encouraged members of the steering committee to consider establishing a SDMG that could exercise considerable powers over both school policy development and school finances. In so doing, the Principal indicated a preparedness to reduce his autonomy and share authority for decision-making with all the representatives on the SDMG.

The steering committee at Jardine comprised of representatives drawn from the staff, the student body and parents. As previously noted it was one of the parent representatives, who exerted a tremendous influence over the planning process. The P&C at Jardine was a powerful body with a history of strong involvement in fund raising and subsequent allocation of resources within the school. The executive of this body viewed the Principal's model of a school council as posing a direct threat to the operations of the P&C. Consequently, the P&C representative openly opposed the establishment of any SDMG that didn't emerge as a sub-committee of the P&C.

The power struggle both inside and outside of the steering committee led not only to a division within this planning group, but ultimately to open hostility between the P&C and the school administration. After several tense preliminary meetings, overt planning was abandoned altogether and new strategies emerged that took the issue into the broader arena.

At each school, in all steering committee meetings, a key person maintained a position of authority and a significant influence over the adaptation process. This was particularly so at both Langley and Maylup where clear indications of what Janis (1985) termed "group think" arose during the sequence of planning meetings. At Langley for instance, every suggestion put by the Principal was overtly supported by the participants. At Maylup, while contributions to the planning process were forwarded by the Principal, among teachers and parents, there was very limited debate or dissension. Only at Jardine did open debate and conflict occur between the key person and parent representatives.

Assistance

The amount of assistance sought by steering committees during the adaptation phase varied considerably from site to site. At Langley a strong relationship existed between the school and the District School Development Officer. The SDO served three functions for the steering committee. Firstly, he provided information from a variety of sources including other schools. Secondly, he acted as a sounding board for ideas and helped facilitate discussions about the form and function of the SDMG. And thirdly, he served to communicate and clarify emerging Ministry policy with regard to school development planning. Members of the steering committee considered the assistance offered by the SDO to be most valuable.

Information

Since the brief of each steering committee involved the development of guide-lines concerning the structure and function of a SDMG, it was important to analyse the type of information used when determining such guide-lines. Generally, information sought and used was of three types. The first type involved "official" documents disseminated by Central Office of Education that related specifically to the structure and functions of SDMGs. Included here are the Better Schools Discussion Document on SDMGs and Development Plans, The Bill for the Amendment of the

Education Act, draft copies of the Regulations accompanying the Bill, and finally the Policy and Guide-lines for School Development Plans.

The second type of information involved documents and ideas stemming from organizations other than Central Office. Included here was information from the Teachers' Union, Principal and Deputy Principal Associations, the State-wide Parents & Citizens Association, other schools and other education systems. Such information took various forms, such as written documents, diagrams of models and verbal information about the structure and functions of SDMGs.

The third type concerned information about the existing characteristics of the school setting. This information was often not made explicit within the steering committee. It was the type of information that was acquired through an association with the school either as a parent or a member of staff. In each steering committee there were participants who had more that five years of direct association with the school and had acquired a knowledge about both the operations of the school and the nature of the community it the school served. Such tacit information served to shape perceptions not only about what was desirable for the school but also what was possible within the given environment. In addition, some information about the characteristics of the school setting was made explicit through verbal descriptions by participants or through data derived from surveys conducted by the school.

For Jardine, official documents relating to the structure and functions of the SDMG, coupled with information derived from past experience, served to direct the Principals stance on the type of group to be established. At the first meeting of the steering committee the Principal presented a "model" detailing the possible structure of a SDMG. The Principal envisaged that the SDMG would hold responsibility not only for the development of school policy but also for the financial management of the school. Such an empowered SDMG would assume many of the functions of the existing P&C so that that body would only continue in so far as it represented a forum for parents. Since the Principal was new to the school, his views about the nature of SDMG were based on limited information about the existing characteristics of the school setting. As a consequence it was not immediately apparent to the Principal that the establishment of a SDMG could create conflict and division between the school and the existing P&C decision-making body.

At Langley, official documents coupled with information stemming from the District Office via the co-ordinator of the existing school development committee, were the major external influences affecting the adaptation process. Initial information included a range of models for SDMGs developed by Central Office and other PSP schools. From the commencement of the adaptation process, a sub-group of the steering committee (two staff members, the Principal and the SDO) examined relevant Central Office documents in the light of their knowledge and perceptions about the nature of the community the school served. Information about what other schools had done was

also used to determine what was desirable and what was possible to establish at Langley. The two staff members responsible for the development of guide-lines sorted through and adapted features to fit the existing structures of their environments. Of particular importance to this sub-group was the perceived difficulty of obtaining sufficient parental participation to enable a SDMG to function. While restricting the functions of the SDMG to a advisory and supportive role only, the sub-group produced initial guide-lines that conformed to Central Office 's suggestions about composition.

For Maylup, the information of most influence in the adaptation process stemmed from other schools, rather than from Central Office . After some initial translation of the policy document, the acting Principal and the Chairperson of the committee were of the view that the notion of self-determining schools offered Maylup an opportunity to raise the public profile of the school. They thought would best be achieved through the establishment of a properly constituted SDMG to be known as the Maylup School Board. The Chairperson of the steering committee was given the responsibility of drafting such a constitution. Subsequently the Chairperson obtained a copy of the constitution of an Independent school's council and used this as a basis for the Maylup School Board.

Disinchantment and Change Overload

As the adaptation process continued in each of the case-study schools, discussion documents and policy guide-lines produced by the Ministry were disseminated to each school. Rather than clarify issues the information stemming from Central Office appeared to increasingly restrict the extent to which the respective steering committees could make decisions about the form and functions of the SDMG. Indeed, the very notion of self-determining schools contained in the initial policy document seemed to be forgotten as emerging Ministry documents began to delimit the school-based initiatives. As a consequence resistence to change began to surface in each school.

As Jardine's Deputy Principal noted:

> All these changes upset paticipants because they start on one track and now Central Office is saying that they have to do something different ...It seems that on any whim a new change comes in.

As the year progressed there appeared a growing disinterest in the establishment of a SDMG among the teaching staff in general and members of the administration in all three schools. The possible causes of such disinterest were not difficult to identify. During the previous three years all school communities were being pressed by Central Office to implement a large number of concurrent changes. Such changes included new curriculums in lower and upper secondary school, lower school moderation, Post Compulsory Education Proposals, Performance Management, Monitoring Standards in Education Project, the School Grant (school funding), School Development Plans, and School-Based Decision-Making Groups. Understandably all these changes placed a tremendous pressure, not only on the school administration, but also on teaching staff. As energy was drained, staff enthusiasm and support for change declined. Consequently many staff began to perceive the

establishment of a SDMG and school development planning as too demanding of their time and too disruptive to their teaching.

As staff members at Maylup noted:

> I was initially pleased because I appreciated the information and the opportunity for involvement. I wanted to be a part of it, but now I feel the exercise in not worth my effort. Is Central Office really serious?
>
> I think most of us here feel that it is all coming at once and occurring too quickly. I know I am fed up.
>
> All this is happening and you get the education of the kids constantly and increasingly disrupted: to their disadvantage.

While staff at each of the schools indicated a growing dissatisfaction with the number and rate of change, Central Office continued to prompt their implementation. Within such a climate, it was the Principals who were faced with the challenging task of maintaining the momentum of change while ensuring any disruption to teaching was kept to a minimum.

Conflict and Continuence

The State School Teachers Union, long concerned about lack of consultation between the Ministry of Education the Union and Parent Bodies now viewed the rate and nature of change as having a detrimental effect on the working conditions of its members and classroom teaching and instruction. Consequently the Union directed its members not to participate in the implementation of SBDMGs.

At Jardine, the union directive on non-participation came just as the steering committee was to consider the possible structure and function of a SBDMG. The Principal, already confronted by a hostile P&C executive, was now confronted with the prospect of no active staff participation or support. Therefore he had no alternative but to abandon all formal steering committee meetings. At Maylup, the steering committee had reached agreement on the draft constitution and held its first full school council meeting despite the Union directive. While some staff expressed a desire to continue with meetings, reluctantly the Principal cancelled all further council meetings until the following year. Only at Langley did the fledgling school council continue to operate. However, without staff representatives the council served only as a community contact group and served only as a forum for disseminating information about budget resourcing and the development planning process.

Outcomes of the Research

Any change, be it a product or policy, is not introduced into a vacuum. Indeed, the data derived from the study confirms that it is the nature or the school setting and its culture that affect the implementation process. However, as Huberman & Miles (1984) assert schools are not closed

systems consequently they are exposed to ideas and information stemming from external sources and are t affected by political and ideological turbulence occurring within broader change environments

Data indicate that in addition to the characteristics of the innovation, it is the nature of the context in which change occurs that exerts the most pronounced influence on the implementation process. In particular, the existence of a collaborative approach to administrative decision-making appears strongly related to a positive receptiveness towards the implementation of SDMG's. A lack of such participation in decision-making prevents the development of necessary skills among members of the school community to effectively contribute to the school-based decision-making process. Further, where limited history of collaboration in decision-making exists, the introduction of participation through a SDMG marks a fundamental change to the existing decision-making procedures.

Leadership, particularly the Principal leadership, appears to be an important factor influencing the schools preparedness to implement change. The data from this research suggests that the level of Principal commitment to the innovation affects not only their initial stance towards the change, but the subsequent implementation action he or she is prepared to allow within the school. As Miles, (1987) noted, the existence of relevant knowledge and skill associated with the change appeared to affect the Principal's preparedness and capacity to implement change.
In analysing the schools' responses to the innovation, data indicate that a complex process of evaluation of the innovation was undertaken. It appears that participants used their knowledge about the existing characteristics of the school to make judgements about how well the establishment of a SDMG would fit with the existing school organisation.

This initial evaluation of "organisational fit" appears more that just a simple cost-benefit type analysis of implementing the innovation. Judgements seem to have been less rational and influenced by a large number of related yet more problematic considerations. Issues such as the possibility for disruption to the existing authority relationships within the school, the impact of implementation of classroom processes, the impact on the school's relationship with parent groups and the school's capacity to resource and sustain the implementation process, all appeared to have played a important role in each school's determination of organisational fit.

The unique nature of each school's organisational characteristics appear to influence not only receptiveness to restructuring and reform but the type change strategies adopted, the range of information and assistance used, and must importantly, the degree to which members of the organisation will persevere with the implementation process. To gain an understanding of the dynamics and complexities of the implementation process, it seems essential to view change as context dependent. Central Office and school level, close attention needs to be given to the nature of the school as an organisation as well as the characteristics of its environment. Through such an

approach to change, appropriate support and strategies might be developed that better facilitate the type of organisational transformation that is intended to promote school development and create "Better Schools".

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